

fitness
Tuesday, at
dozen people, most
while before moving
Center or the nearby
which matters beyond whether
few more people spend more time in
Holladay Park, and whether the folks
paying for Holladay's improvements —
mostly the new owners of the Lloyd Cen-
ter — have to replace a few chairs or ta-
bles or a pingpong table that might or

might not get vandalized in time.

For a long while, Holladay Park has been known as a dangerous park, to be avoided by nearly everybody after dark and by women and children during the day. Fourteen-year-old Shiloh Hampton was shot and killed there in 2011. On and off, police have increased their presence in the park. A neighborhood volunteer group called Connected has walked the park on Friday evenings in an attempt to re-establish safety and a sense of com-

munity.

Change has been made to Holladay Park, according to Alex Garvin, a city planner and author of *Parks: The Key to Livable Communities*. "You can't have bad parks in a healthy city," Garvin says. A park in which city residents don't feel safe or invited, in Garvin's view, defines a city

process, properties, nesses, gove profit groups and institutions.

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Brownfields' buried in bureaucracy

City prepares first complete inventory of dirty little secrets

by JENNIFER ANDERSON
The Tribune

Tucked into a yet-to-be-gentrified neighborhood in Northeast Portland is a mountain of lead-contaminated soil, waiting to be picked up and hauled away to a hazardous waste site.

The soil — about three truckloads full — is at Northeast Emerson Court and Ninth Avenue, well hidden from public view

since it's sandwiched between houses and a site called Emerson Garden, a small community project about four years in the making.

The soil at the garden itself has been reclaimed and tested as clean, years after a house with lead paint burned down and left lead traces in the soil. Organic vegetables grow onsite and schoolchildren use it as an outdoor classroom.

But the hazardous pile in the back, locked behind a chain-link fence and covered in ivy, is a looming reminder that brownfields like this are more frequent than we might think — part of

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Jan Zuckerman and Amilcar Alvarez of Portland stand in Emerson Garden near the fence and warning sign that marks a large mound of lead-contaminated soil, an example of the city's brownfield issue. Coordinators hope a grant will pay to remove the dirt within the next six months.

TRIBUNE PHOTO: LACEY JACOBY

Portland Tribune

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Brownfields: Sites costly to clean, reclaim

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the Portland's dirty little secrets, despite being lauded for its green ethos and environmentalism.

"If someone were playing in that pile, it would be a problem," says Cassie Cohen, executive director of Groundwork Portland, a Northeast Portland nonprofit that's helped to transform the garden with help from neighbors and volunteers.

Cohen and her group have been lobbying the city to release its "historic commercial use inventory," a database of former sites like gas stations and dry cleaners in Portland that may have left contaminants behind.

Known as brownfields, those sites are costly to clean up and rehabilitate and often mired in layers of bureaucracy, with neighborhood, city, state, federal and private parties often at odds.

Tyler Bump, an economic planner at the city's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, says his office is close to completing the inventory and will then wait for the City Council to take up the brownfields issue before releasing it to the public.

It will be the first of its kind in the city.

"We looked back to pretty much every peak of the economic cycle, starting in 1936," Bump says. "For every eight years we looked at the business index, got the addresses, geocoded them, mapped the historical land uses."

The report will inform the city's Comprehensive Plan update process as well as various other planning decisions. "It's consistent with development patterns across the city," Bump says. "It's different snapshots in time. It does reflect how the city has grown in the last 80 years."

When the inventory is released, it will show property owners, environmental activists, residents and groups like Groundwork Portland just how prevalent brownfields are in the city.

Community involvement

Since forming an affiliate chapter of the national organization in 2008, Groundwork Portland takes a community-first approach to revitalizing spaces.

Their mission is to involve low-income residents, people of color, youth and others traditionally left out of government processes in the city's land and water cleanup projects.

They've taken on three major projects so far, which they spotlighted to the public during a "Dirty Side of Portland" bus tour this past weekend.

The three-hour tours on Saturday and Sunday attracted about 30 people each, a mix of young people, environmentalists, media and others impacted or just curious about the issue.

People paid on a sliding scale of \$10 to \$25. The two other groups hosting the tour were the non-profit civic engagement group Know Your City (formerly the Dill Pickle Club) and 1000 Friends of Oregon.

The tour stopped at the Emerson Garden, the Portland Harbor Superfund Site, and a half-acre site at Southeast Division Street and 124th Avenue that used to house a nightclub and before that a dry cleaners.

Now it's just a vacant lot filled with overgrown weeds, with a small mural on one wall that students painted.

McDonald's has expressed an interest in leasing the space, but the neighbors — who call themselves the United Nations of Portland, reflective of their enormous diversity — aren't thrilled by it.

"Business development is the primary thing that will keep us from becoming a ghetto," says Kem Marks, a volunteer with the Division-Midway Alliance and member of the East Portland Action Plan.

"We need companies that are going to drive economic development, that serve the community and lift it up, not serve people on their way down."

East Portland neighbors have held meetings over the years to

"Business development is the primary thing that will keep us from becoming a ghetto."

— Kem Marks, Division-Midway Alliance



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Visitors to Emerson Garden enjoyed barbecue chicken, watermelon and other snacks as part of the "Dirty Side of Portland" bus tour last weekend; more tours may be offered as the proposed Superfund plan approaches.



Cassie Cohen (left), executive director of Groundwork Portland, engages neighbors and youth in environmental justice projects and community education around the city. Will Bennett (right), Emerson Garden coordinator for Groundwork Portland, tends to the plants and greets visitors, including school children.



create their own vision for the space, which includes a large community garden, water feature, basketball court and open green space where they could gather, possibly sell their food and wares, and be seen as a destination in East Portland.

Lori Boisen, district manager of the Division-Midway Alli-

ance, said the site also could play a key role in the East Portland rapid transit plans underway. She wishes officials at the city and Portland Development Commission would agree to help attract investors to this site, and laments the fact that most nonprofit groups are located in North and

Northeast Portland.

"It would be nice if they could have satellite offices" in East Portland, she says.

Boisen and others won't say they're flat out against McDonald's coming in, because "at least it would be something, not a hole," she says. "We have many vacancies in the district that are still vacant for four or five years," she says.

Superfund site still in limbo

The first stop on the tour was the boat ramp under the St. Johns Bridge, next to the signs warning that certain fish like bass and carp are toxic for consumption.

Fourteen years after being declared a Superfund site, individual cleanup projects along the Willamette River have made progress, but there's been no overall plan to remove the contaminated sediments along the 11-mile stretch of river that used to be dump sites for companies like Gasco and Arkema.

Now, the water is safe to recreate in but the biggest danger is eating certain fish and the lin-

gering contaminants.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is due to release their proposed cleanup plan in early 2016, which will surely stir a lot of attention.

Rick Muza, source control project manager for the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, says he anticipates that a round of public meetings will start next fall just prior to the proposed plan's release.

In the meantime, the Portland Harbor Community Advisory Group meets the second Wednesday of each month to discuss the community's role in shaping the cleanup effort. The next meeting is 6 to 8 p.m. Aug. 13, at the Bureau of Environmental Services Water Lab, 6543 N. Burlington St.

Groundwork hopes to see a diverse segment of the public step up and have their voices heard in this process and others.

"If we don't step up and take some action," Cohen says, "this whole process will blow over and none of us will benefit."

For more: portlandharbor.org/info.